

Personal recollections of early Washington and a sketch of the life of Captain William Easby

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY WASHINGTON AND A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN WILLIAM EASBY

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PAPER READ BEFORE THE ASSOCIATION OF THE OLDEST INHABITANTS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA JUNE 4, 1913 BY MRS. WILHELMINE M. EASBY-SMITH

ASSOCIATION OF THE OLDEST INHABITANTS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

Nineteenth and H Streets, N. W.

Washington, D. C., *May 3 d*, 1913.

Mrs. W. M. Easby-Smith.

Mt. Washington, Md.

My dear Madam:

This association directed me at its meeting last evening to respectfully invite you to deliver an address or read a paper before it at its next meeting, June 4th.

You can select your own topic, but I told them that I thought you would have something to say about Easby's Point as well as Captain Easby.

I am sure it will be highly appreciated.

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Very respectfully yours, John B. McCarthy, *Corresponding Secretary*.

Mr. President, Gentlemen of the "Oldest Inhabitants Association" and Friends:

You have asked me to give you some of my recollections of the early days at Easby's Point, as well as some mention of the career of my father, Captain William Easby, from whom it derived its present name. I must acknowledge that but for my desire that his name be not lost to the memory of the "Oldest Inhabitants Association" I should have hesitated in accepting the invitation by which you have so highly honored his daughter.

EASBY'S POINT.

The part of the City in which Easby's Point is situated was, before the establishment of the District of Columbia, part of a tract belonging to Robert Peter, and on the map of the first survey was called "Mexico." There were many plats of ground variously named—"Hamburg" beyond Camp Hill on the river; above to the north "Port Royal," "Widow's Mite," "Jamaica" and, among others, it being the only one still retaining its name, was "Mt. Pleasant," which also belonged to Robert Peter.

I have often endeavored to find out how this holding of Mr. Peter came by its name, and whether the visit of the Spaniards to Axacan, which is supposed to be the Occoquan of our day, who afterwards returned to Mexico, had any bearing on the matter.

Mr. Hugh Taggart, in his invaluable paper read before the Columbia Society May 13, 1907, says:

"The mouth of Rock Creek of our day does not exhibit a single feature of its appearance in 1751, when Georgetown was created; at that time the creek was a navigable stream within which the tide ebbed and flowed for a considerable distance above the present P Street bridge; then, and for many years subsequently, there were visible in it, on frequent

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occasions, the tall masts of the trader to European coastwise ports, where now the only water craft to be seen is the sand scow.

“The creek at its junction with the river formed quite a large bay; its mouth extended from the point near the old Observatory grounds, where Littlefield's wharf is located (which point was first known as Cedar Point, and afterwards, successively, as Windmill Point, Peter's Point and Easby's Point)* to a point on the present Water Street between Thirty-first Street, which was formerly known as Congress Street, and Wisconsin Avenue, which was formerly known as High Street.”

* There was another name by which the point was called, viz: “Foggy Bottom.”

In looking over the old charts in the Library of Congress I noticed a coincidence in the similarity of this turn in the river at the Point and the contour of the land to that at Boston, with the identical name of Windmill Point, at the end of the cape so formed.

When Captain Easby bought the property upon which he decided to locate there was only a bare stretch of land and water from the point where the rock cabin, supposed to have been the dwelling of the keeper of the vanished windmill, to the “Stone House” on the river's edge between G and H Streets. The old “Stone House” was very large and was probably built for a custom house, being at the confluence of the river and Rock Creek. A few years ago this old land mark was demolished.

On square 12 Captain Easby built his dwelling and tenant houses. On square south of 12 the ship lofts were erected and afterwards the wharves. At first and until after the residence was completed, he and his young sons, Horatio and John, boarded with a family at the “Stone House,” only returning to their home near the Navy Yard for week 5 ends. On square south of 12 was the furnace where the timbers were steamed (I suppose to make them pliable), and later the ice house was built there. This building is still standing. On this

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lot some years later, in connection with the blacksmith shop, the sheet-iron buoys for the Government were constructed.

After the completion of the canal the tow-path from Rock Creek to D Street was on its east side. Here, crossing the bridge, it formed the boundary of the ship yard. Turning eastward near the Point, it ran on the south of the canal to Seventeenth Street where the Tiber Creek basin was located. Upon this tow-path traveled the mules that drew the barges, and in my childhood there were not many hours in the day that laden boats might not be seen on their way to the entrance to the Potomac near the Arsenal, at the mouth of James Creek.

Originally, it would seem that the river swept more or less fiercely around the Point, making a deep curve into the land, where lower down was Braddock's Rock, which had been a landing place from time immemorial. It was quite a puzzle, in my young days, how it had been possible, for a boat to land so far inshore as was situated this celebrated rock. Evidently, however, the bed of the river near the shore was utilized for the canal, the embankment for the tow-path being thrown up outside.

Upon this embankment from the Point to Seventeenth Street was planted a row of shade trees (sycamore, as I remember them), of which a few skeletons still survive. Among my pleasantest memories are those of the walks on that breezy, shady old tow-path, on summer evenings with my father and my mother. To the south lay the river, covering what afterwards was known as the "Potomac Flats," and is now "Potomac Park" or "The Speedway."

With doors opening into the ship yard and others on the tow-path, between the bridge and the Point, was the engine house. The fire drills interested me greatly. I was always keen to go as near as they would allow me, generally on the bridge, as soon as the alarm was sounded.

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Near E Street, on the river bank, was the store-house for cement.

HAMBURG—FUNKSTOWN.

Hamburg, where in 1833 Captain Easby built the lime kilns, was originally a village of some pretensions, at least upon paper. It was laid out in 1770 by Jacob Funk in squares and streets, in the center a large plat for a Town House. It extended from the river about as far north and including H Street. Jacob Funk gave the ground for the German Lutheran Church. L'Enfant, in one of his letters, calls the village Funkstown. Funk was a gunmaker of Georgetown during the Revolution. It seems that quite a colony of Hollanders settled thereabouts early in the eighteenth century.

It is more than three-quarters of a century since I first opened my eyes at Easby's Point. I do not remember quite so far back as that particular 14th of July, 1835, but I do distinctly recollect events that took place when I was not more than three years of age. My very first remembrance is of crossing the river to the Arlington Landing, in a skiff with one or other of my brothers, and the man who cared for our horses and cows. The skiff was paddled over every evening to bring back a load of the sweet meadow grass which we were privileged to cut. In these trips we frequently paddled into the wake of some large vessel, or into the water churned into fury by some passing sidewheel steamboat, and how I enjoyed the tossing, with no thought of danger! Ships, both foreign and native, were ever to be seen, for even so late as 1856 I remember that Georgetown was a considerable shipping port. How often, in later years in a southern climate, in the vagaries of fever, have I dreamed that could I only drop my hands again over the side of the skiff into the old Potomac water, relief would come.

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I well remember George Washington Parke Custis and his family. Mrs. Lee was quite an artist, which aroused my interest in her. She made a fine copy of a Turner my father owned, a privilege he allowed no one else.

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General Lee often crossed to our landing on his way to the Department or to the City, when he happened to be on duty or on leave. The interchange of boats was customary as they chanced to have been left at our respective landings.

“Black Bob,” as they called him at that time, was the same amiable, genial gentleman then as when I last met him in Richmond, a year before the surrender, his hair no longer black, but whitened more from care than from age. No one who knew Robert E. Lee could ever forget him, or ever believe that a greater name has embellished the annals of American renown.

THE OLD HOME.

Lately I visited the old home of my childhood, but the place was well nigh unrecognizable. The dwelling house, large for those days, is transformed into a blacksmith's shop, and the upper rooms into a depository for junk.

The old garden, which occupied nearly half the square except the corner lot where dwelt the Ferguson family, has disappeared. The luscious fruit—figs, grapes, apples, pears, prunes, and rare flowers that attracted many visitors, have long since perished. This part of the property is now covered by the buildings of Littlefield and Alvord.

The bridge that spanned the canal is gone, for the canal is no longer there. The bells of the mules have ceased to jingle, their drivers' calls are hushed.

Other enterprises have been carried on now for many years. The ship yard has been transformed into an establishment for asphalt work, and is owned by the Cranford Paving Company.

Not a vestige of the old rock cabin remains. Beyond its site Littlefield's Wharf has been constructed. Ere long all these will have been wiped off the earth, and effaced from the maps, the whirr and honk of the automobile and the hoof beats of blooded steeds will

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replace the sound of the hammers and steam whistles of busy industries, and "Potomac Park" will be the new name for "Easby's Point."

In that old rock cabin, on the point, lived Dyson Moran, who had charge and supervision of all the horses used in the several branches of my father's business enterprises. He also drove my mother's carriage. In those days it was absolutely necessary to keep carriages and horses, there being no other means of conveyance, and Washington was even then a place of magnificent distances. We were great walkers then, it being a frequent occurrence to walk from the Point to the Navy Yard, at least four miles, and to Georgetown was considered a very short promenade.

The old cabin with its thick walls and immense chimney place was a very comfortable abode. I am inclined to think that Mrs. Moran was older than her husband. I spent many an hour with the old lady; she always had some "goody" stored away specially for me. One day she crossed the bridge over the canal and started down the tow-path towards her home, wrapped in her long, plaid cloak. One of the northwesterners, which seemed to blow more fiercely around the point than in any place I have experienced, whirled her off her feet and into the canal. Fortunately she was seen, and willing hands speedily drew her from the water. I do not believe she ever recovered from the plunge, and though I do not recall the time of her death, I imagine it was shortly after.

Once when returning from school, while walking along in front of the President's house, a rain storm was threateningly near. Moran had been sent to haul new barrels for the lime kiln. He saw me, and halting his wagon, he picked me up, stowed me away into one of the barrels, thus taking me home dry, in spite of the drenching rain.

On Twenty-sixth Street in the rear of our garden lived a family, one of the sons of which, John Fardy, learned shipbuilding in my father's yard, and after having built up a fine ship-building plant in Baltimore and accumulated a large fortune, died in that city. That plant now belongs to the Woodall family, who are relatives of Captain Easby. Mrs. Anderson

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and her family were the next neighbors. One of her daughters, Mrs. Banister, lived to quite a good old age at the Point.

On the northeast corner of Square Twenty-two was the blacksmith shop connected with the ship yard. It was built upon what was known as the Spring lot, because of a rock spring whose cool, limpid water was keenly enjoyed on a hot, summer day and was used by all the neighbors. The vegetables for our table, which were also supplied gratis to many of the neighbors, were raised on this lot.

South of this, bordering on a road above the canal, lived Ignatius Lucas and his good wife. In those days there were no trained nurses. Neighbors visited and helped to care for the sick as a part of neighborly duty, and chief amongst these was Mrs. Lucas, friend, counsellor and comforter of the whole settlement. Mr. Lucas for many years filled a position in either the War or Navy Department.

The Cumberlands lived on the next lot, and their nets and huge ducking guns were great curiosities to me. John Cumberland's third wife was a very remarkable woman. She was the mistress of the house in which were four families of children, she having been a widow with children, and they all lived together in peace and happiness, devoted to her.

Heurich's brewery now covers the ground of the Spring lot, that of the Cumberland's and the Lucases, and also the site where Mr. John Boyle had his residence. My only recollection of Mr. Boyle is that he was said to closely resemble General Zachary Taylor, and when the latter on the eve of his inauguration came out upon the hotel balcony to greet the crowd assembled they would have none of him, 10 breaking out in howls and jeers: "Ah! get out, Johnny Boyle, you can't fool us,"—greatly to the discomfiture of General Taylor.

Sloping gently up from Twenty-sixth Street was Camp Hill, later known as Observatory Hill, and now occupied by the Naval Hospital. It was there that Braddock camped in 1755, and an epidemic of illness causing the death of many of his men, they were buried on the side

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of the hill. When I first recollect it the remains of shrubbery that had been planted to mark the graves, with a few sunken spots still visible, interfered somewhat with a sport to which the children Of that day were partial, to lie down and roll over and over down hill.

A small portion of the old hill remains intact just in the rear of a building belonging to Abner and Drury, and there the dust of some of the buried soldiers is still undisturbed.

Camp Hill was my favorite resort as a playground, and my indignation was great when, on my way from school one day, I encountered a crowd of workmen digging for the foundation of the observatory; and the opening of E Street through my beloved hill was, in my opinion, but the adding of insult to injury.

To the north of the Hill the Fletcher family lived; on F Street were the Biggs, Linkins and Bolyars.

Next to the lot where the Byrams lived, at the corner of E and Twenty-sixth Streets, my father had a vacant lot. A Russian gentlemen, Von Schmid by name, and his son, induced my father as an experiment to plant this lot in hemp. I do not know what was the outcome of the hemp crop, but at the same time my father allowed them to use a basement room in one of his houses for a chemical laboratory, into which, child-like one day I wandered, coming out with hands and face stained mahogany color that was quite a while in wearing off. I do not believe that I ever after meddled with unknown quantities.

The old Frye Mansion, not far from the old Stone House 11 on G or H Street, was a delightful visiting place. I remember that I approved specially of the beautiful Mimosa trees, because they were so easy to climb.

The Fillebrown house on G Street near Twenty-first Street, was another favorite visiting place. The Captain had many curios collected during his cruises, which he delighted to show me. This house my brother, John Ward Easby, bought and improved, making

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it his residence for many years. He died there June 17, 1894. It is still the home of his daughters.

My father fitted up a little steamboat for pleasure trips on the canal, and my brother John, afterwards Chief of the Bureau of Construction in the United States Navy, was put in command of the *Gallant*, as she was christened. Many were the picnic excursions to the Great Falls that we enjoyed. Once the *Gallant* made an excursion to Norfolk, and caught in a storm on the bay, was with difficulty saved. By his family and friends my brother was ever after dubbed Captain, long before he had a right to add the U. S. N.

On the occasion of one excursion, Commodore Forest was an invited guest. He never adopted modern fashions, but always wore knee breeches and buckled shoes. I was only five years old, but he had the misfortune to offend me so mortally that no apology, no persuasion could obtain my forgiveness. The old gentlemen used tobacco, and as I inadvertently stood to the leeward of him, a drop of the essence of tobacco, found its way into my eye. I do not know whether it was the pain or the indignity that made me so unforgiving.

Commodore Forest's residence was at "Locust Grove," on Twentieth between E and F Streets. The grounds occupied the whole square, or at least a great part of it. Years afterwards my brother Horatio built his residence on F Street, utilizing the old Forest house in his back building.

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LAUNCHINGS.

The gala days at the Point were when a ship was launched. As these were generally built for the Government, cabinet officers, officials of high rank, and frequently foreign diplomats, were among the guests.

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Every detail for a launching must be carefully prepared, that no hitch nor blunder may occur, and the workmen waited with baited breath for the success of the launching, for in these old times they were greatly interested in their work, and became really attached to their construction as it grew into graceful proportions.

It was a beautiful and exciting scene to watch the large vessel start on the ways and to listen to the strokes of the hammers that loosed the wedges, to see her slowly gathering impetus as she glided gracefully down into the water upon whose bosom she was to spend her life and beneath which sooner or later she would find her grave.

Then a collation spread in one of the ship lofts was enjoyed by guests and employees.

I well remember the launchings of the revenue cutters *Forward*, in 1842 or 1843, and *Lawrence*, in 1847. The *Forward* was in commission for more than a quarter of a century, and may still be in existence. My brother, Doctor James Thompson Overstreet, whose father, a Congressman from South Carolina, was my mother's first husband, was appointed surgeon of the *Lawrence*, which sailed to California. While on her way the gold was discovered. Doctor Overstreet was accidentally killed in Los Angeles in 1853.

FRESHETS.

Perhaps the most exciting time was that of a freshet in the river. With the first clang of the ship-yard bell, sometimes at midnight, summoning the employees, they came hurrying to put in safety whatever the water might threaten to carry off and to make things secure generally.

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At break of day came people from far and near with grappling hooks to rescue from the flood whatever they might find useful—and many secured quantities of firewood for winter use, the freshet being a God-send to them.

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I remember observing as a fact, that a pig in swimming cuts its own throat with its hoof. Once I saw one rescued almost dead from the flood, with its neck already bleeding.

The stone work for a wharf was completed just below the cement house, but was not filled in, and it was decided to utilize it for a sturgeon pond. A large number of these huge fish were imprisoned, when a freshet came along and liberated them, at the same time overflowing the bank, until the surging torrent took entire possession of the canal.

At one time quite a wave of indignation was aroused when Captain Easby fenced in the ship-yard. The children, both white and black, from around the whole region were in the habit of crowding in at all hours to pick up chips and shavings.

While my father was the most generous of men and was quite willing that the poor should have the "chips," this began to mean anything that had been left or dropped by the workmen. So the fence was built and the hours for picking were restricted to convenient times when the gates were set open. Not only howls but threats were made by the disgruntled ones, but no reprisals were ever attempted.

SHROVE-TUESDAY SPORTS.

The old Shrove-Tuesday sports were merrily held by the young people of the neighborhood in the kitchen. Its huge fireplace made it easy to wield the frying pan with its handle from three to five feet in length, on which were tossed and turned the pancakes, the dropping of one of which called for a forfeit. My second recollection is that some one allowed the handle to fall upon my head, cutting a gash from 14 around which my father shaved the hair and put in a stitch, for withal, he was somewhat of a surgeon. Among the young men who visited the house were William and Henry Lowry, whose sister afterwards became the wife of my brother John. A niece of my mother and a relative of my father were among the young ladies. My brother Horatio married my mother's niece, Miss Elizabeth Barton.

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A game they called "Shinny" was very popular with the boys and young men. I believe this is an old game of Indian origin. How I used to wish I were a boy that I might play with them!

On the square east of the lime kiln a glass factory had been established in 1807, but it was abandoned before my recollection. Often when waiting for my father to finish his visit to the kilns, I would saunter down to hunt choice bits of colored glass, so prized by children. The glass house untenanted, unused, fell gradually into decay. No sign of it remained when the Speedway was first contemplated.

Edmond Hanley was Captain Easby's partner in the lime kilns until his death, when the former bought the whole interest. Mr. Hanley lived on Nineteenth Street below F Street. He built a beautiful house on G Street near the corner of Twentieth, where not long after he died.

Alcanah Denham was the manager of the kilns for more than twenty years, until after Captain Easby's death. He occupied the house vacated by Mr. Hanley on Nineteenth Street, where he died in 1881.

THE SCHOOLS OF EARLY DAYS.

In my childhood our present Public School system had not been established, and there were only a few Common Schools, as they were called. My parents were greatly interested in having Mrs. Rodier given charge of the First Ward School and my father was instrumental in having her appointed. I think that for many years her school was in 15 this very room where we are gathered to-night. There was a writing teacher named Easton who appeared to have been patronized considerably.

My first music teacher, who also taught my cousins, who lived with us, was Mr. Reiss. My prominent recollection of this gentleman is that he rode a white horse, and lifting me up in front of him, frequently gave me little rides. Afterwards Mr. Pratt, from Alexandria,

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had a number of pupils in the First Ward, myself among them. He continued my musical education at Mrs. Kingsford's school in Alexandria.

Richard Gibson, a portrait painter, was employed by several of the private schools to teach drawing and painting. He was my teacher at Miss English's seminary in Georgetown, and I afterwards was one of a private class he taught at his house on Thirteenth Street below Pennsylvania Avenue. His wife was a charming lady.

The Misses Lomax taught a select school on the Avenue, near the corner of Twenty-first Street. It was there that I began my school life. On the reservation in front was the old Western Market. I afterwards was sent to a French school kept by a M. Michard. There I became acquainted with the daughters of many prominent men, among others Mary Upshur, for whom I entertained all a child's devotion for a lovely girl some years older than herself.

This school was on G Street between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets, and day by day I saw the Church of the Epiphany growing taller and taller until it was finished. Generally my father took me to school in his buggy, but frequently I walked home. My way led around the old circular wall south of the White House grounds, and it so happened that Commodore Upshur, going home from the State Department, then north of the Treasury, often met me, and we chatted together as far as his home on F Street.

At one of the school entertainments, when my parents 16 were about to introduce me, they were quite astonished to learn that we were already well acquainted.

Commodore Upshur's death was a great shock to me. I was present at the funeral from the White House where he, with the other victims of the terrible episode of the bursting of the *Princeton's* big gun, lay in state.

M. Michard afterwards occupied the building on the west side of New Jersey Avenue near south B Street, the site of which is now occupied by the Coast Survey, in which building

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the Bank of Washington spent its childhood. Its cradle had been in the old Middletown house, across the street, on the site now occupied by the House of Representatives Office Building.

The old vault under the building occupied by M. Michard must have been nearly filled with the stones we children delighted to throw into what was to us its awesome and immeasurable depth. Adjoining it was the residence of James Adams, so long president of the Bank of Washington. His daughter was one of my school mates. Across B Street, not then opened, which served as our playground, was the old Columbian Engine House.

On the way from school, sometimes by way of New York Avenue, sometimes on F Street, on the latter near Twenty-first. I observed the erection of a lath-and-plaster house. which aroused much ridicule in the community, being called "Maxwell's Folly." I notice that it is still standing there.

On New York Avenue I frequently passed the Octagon House, then in the days of its glory. On the opposite corner was the residence of Michael Shanks, whose daughter was one of the few associates of my own age, and with whom I often stopped to play.

In 1848 a small building was erected at Twenty-second and E Streets, for a Union Sunday School. There the children of the neighborhood were gathered on Sunday afternoons. H. N. and J. W. Easby, with David M. Wilson, were the originators of the Mission, and I came frequently from the 17 east end to help them sing, and teach the children. Out of this little mission, begun by laymen belonging to different sects, grew the present Western Presbyterian Church.

In the same square with the Union Sunday School building, on the east side of Twenty-third Street, lived a fortune teller, whose name I do not recall. She owned a nice cottage with an attractive garden. People from far and near came to consult her. The children of

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the neighborhood and the more ignorant and superstitious of the people of the settlement patronized her, but the cultured and sensible citizens were ever trying to get rid of her.

The Fillmore family and my own had been friends for many years before he became President, and during his administration many of the days of my 'teens were spent in the White House. Miss Fillmore, "Abbie," as we called her, was some years older than myself. She was a fine musician, and when she heard me play on the harp she immediately decided that, being a fine pianist, she must also learn the harp. My harp was not used while I was at school, so it was loaned to her, and remained in the White House until one was purchased for her. She studied under my own teacher at the Georgetown Visitation Academy, and very soon became quite proficient as a harpist.

The last time, a few weeks before his death, that I had the pleasure of talking with W. W. Corcoran, he referred to the time when he remembered me as a child, flitting in and out of the White House.

WILLIAM EASBY.

William Easby was a native of Yorkshire, which Carlyle calls the epitome of England, because thence have sprung so many of England's greatest men. The same may be said of America, since, among many others, the family of Washington himself came originally from Yorkshire. Yorkshire birth and American training at that earlier time 18 made a great combination. William was but five years of age when he was brought to Philadelphia by his father, accompanied by other relatives. They formed part of a little colony of kinfolk, who seem to have been in quite good circumstances, for they immediately bought lots and built residences, some of which are still the homes of their descendants.

The famous yellow fever epidemic of 1798 swept off very many of them. My grandfather, one of his children, and his brother's whole family, were among the victims. So it happened

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that William's school days were shortened, and it was necessary that he should learn some occupation.

Shipbuilding was his hobby, and he was sent to be taught that trade. His wonderful mathematical mind caused him to become so expert, that when the Navy Yard was opened in Washington he was employed there, not yet being of age.

When, during the war of 1812, in August, 1814, the British were advancing up the Patuxent toward Bladensburg, threatening the Capital City, every man employed at the Navy Yard, my father among them, rushed to enlist under Commodore Barney's command. They were mustered, I believe, in General Smith's Brigade. Of course we all know that the retreat from Bladensburg was a great military blunder on the part of General Winder, although the circumstances left him without blame. The idea, however, that it was an ignominious rout is an error. I have heard that the men were so exasperated at being obliged to obey the order that many of them turned and fired frequently during their retreat. Three or four hundred of the British were killed and six hundred wounded, while the American loss was but twenty killed and thirty or forty wounded, which would prove that a pretty good fight was had.

Thomas Parker, an officer of General Smith's command, thus closes a letter describing the battle: "It is but justice to the troops of General Smith's Brigade, and those attached to it, to say, that no vestige of trepidation or alarm was shown, and that they retained their positions till ordered to retreat. I speak of those troops especially, and of Barney's and Miller's, because I was most with them."

The ravine in which the British were killed was known for years as "Dead Men's Hollow," and the stories I heard of their scant burial always brought grewsome thrills, while driving over the spot so called.

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Once, accompanying my mother on a visit to Mrs. Madison, she kindly, to gratify a child's desire, gave me a sketch of the part she played in those strenuous days.

There was never a more ardent American than was William Easby. He had a very powerful baritone voice and was a fine singer. He was a friend of Francis Scott Key and, if not the first, was, I think, among the very first to sing "The Star Spangled Banner," which was adapted to the air of a familiar Masonic drinking song. The Masons of that day seem to have been decidedly convivial. I have never heard anything so inspiring as the singing by my father and brothers of Key's immortal song.

After the burning of the Navy Yard in 1814, Mr. Easby with his wife, who was the sister of Edward Simms, and their two little girls, returned to Philadelphia, where he remained until recalled to take the position of Master Builder after the Navy Yard was rebuilt. While in Philadelphia his two sons were added to the family.

In 1823 John Lengthall was employed in the Mould Loft at the Navy Yard, where acute mathematical knowledge is absolutely essential. It was here under my father's supervision that Mr. Lengthall became an expert constructor, and so proved himself when in the course of time and through promotion he filled with credit and honor the position of Chief Constructor of the Navy.

In 1824 my father was appointed by President Monroe Captain of Riflemen of the Second Legion, First Brigade, of the Militia of the District of Columbia, and was ever after known by the title thus given him. Employed at the head of different divisions were also my grandfather, Benjamin King, and my greatuncle, John Davis of Abel. These with my father had much to do with the foundation and the flourishing condition of the Masonic Naval Lodge. My father also belonged to Washington Chapter, No. 16, of Royal Arch Masons, where in 1849 he was King.

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Benjamin King built his residence on the corner of I and Tenth Streets, and John Davis of Abel built his on adjoining property with garden spots between. Both houses are still standing.

In a description of the District of Columbia by David Baillie Warden, published in Paris in 1816, under the head of "Navy Yard, Forges," etc., I find: "The director, Benjamin King, a native of England, formerly employed at the Clyde and Carron Works, has a salary of \$2,000, besides an annual allowance for house rent."

Benjamin King afterwards built another residence farther east. He died in Philadelphia in 1840. My granduncle lived in the same house, where he died in 1853, as did his widow in 1881. In the Congressional Cemetery Commodore Tingey's lot is the first as one enters the old gate; my grandfather's is the second, and my granduncle's is just in the rear. The first graves opened in the cemetery were those for Mrs. Tingey and my grandmother King on the same day. They died before the cemetery was ready, and were first buried in Georgetown.

Captain Easby was an ardent Whig, and upon Andrew Jackson's inauguration he resigned his position rather than be subject to dismissal, for the Shibboleth of that time was: "To the Victors belong the Spoils."

It is well for the country that the Civil Service rules have, to a great extent, silenced that cry. For Captain Easby, however, it was most fortunate. And so it was that, looking out for a place in which to establish a shipyard of his own, he decided to locate in the First Ward.

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THE CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL.

Great at that time was the enthusiasm aroused when the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was actually decided upon. Wonderful hopes were entertained of what would be accomplished for American commerce by this waterway connecting the great

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West with the Atlantic. But alas! for the foresight of men. It appears now to my mind that the canal may really be responsible for the ruin of the commerce of Georgetown, which was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "one of the most important seaports of America." The diversion of the volumes of water from Rock Creek and Tiber Creek, may have brought about the condition that so impaired the navigation of the river, for at the mouths of each a basin was constructed which emptied the creeks into the canal.

Indeed, it would seem that the canal absorbed all the little streams along its course, for several were emptied into it at Third Street and Missouri Avenue, and James Creek was used for some distance above its outlet at the Arsenal.

BALTIMORE AND OHIO RAILROAD.

While delay after delay marked the inception of the work an antagonistic and formidable rival arose in the projected Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, a rival that conquered in the end. Upon the same day, July Fourth, 1828, the inauguration of both enterprizes was had, the one in Baltimore, the other at Point of Rocks. In a letter to his mother, who lived in Philadelphia, of date July 5th, 1828, Captain Easby wrote: "Yesterday I witnessed the commencement of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, in which the President of the United States took the conspicuous part of removing the first sod, previous to which he delivered a very appropriate address, after which he took off his coat and went to work in good earnest. The spectacle was a very imposing one. Mr. Adams' appearance was such as to elicit respect from 22 everyone. He looked very much debilitated but bore the fatigue of the day better than was expected."

This letter reminds me that the postage from Washington to Philadelphia was then twenty-five cents. There were no stamps, and regular quarterly accounts were kept at the Post Office by its patrons. There were no envelopes either. Letters were folded so that the bulk of the letter slipped under a single fold, which was secured by sealing wax or wafer.

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I have dwelt thus long upon the topic of the canal, because I judge that it was the prime factor in Captain Easby's selection of a location for his then contemplated plant.

He was intensely interested in the construction of the canal and closely connected with it as contractor and bondholder. I have still, as his Administratrix, some of these bonds, for which, as yet, I have found no use.

When Captain Easby severed his connection with the Government service and began his personal business career, his studies enabled him to turn his attention to various pursuits. Whatever particularly required mathematical calculation, quickness of perception and scientific knowledge he was well equipped to perform. Industry he regarded as a cardinal virtue, and a falsehood he held in almost infinite abhorrence. He was a man of great independence of character with an indomitable will. Naturally he had enemies.

He soon surrounded himself with a force of employees that he could use for any purpose. Many of them had followed him from the Navy Yard. Were canal locks to be constructed, his men could do the work; were bridges to be built, they were ready. They could work on boats of wood or iron. The names of many of his workmen were on his rolls for twenty years, or more, of whom some remained with my brothers when they took charge of the ship yard in 1848.

The honest, efficient workmen that my father employed, 23 and he very quickly eliminated any others, always held him in most affectionate regard. The bond of friendship between them was never broken. When in the early thirties he met with reverses, his employees simply refused to leave him, and together they weathered the storm until the sun of prosperity shone again.

William Knowles, William Frush, William Fletcher, William Martin, William Marshall, Dyson Moran, George Bean, Samuel Middleton, Adam Ferguson, Alfred Pollard, William Wise,

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are among those whose names appeared on the pay-roll, week after week, month after month, year after year.

My mother was my father's second wife, and as his youngest son and my mother's son by her former marriage were respectively sixteen and thirteen years older than myself, I occupied the position of an only child.

My brother Horatio and his cousin, William Easby, from Philadelphia, were students at Georgetown College. John's school hours were shorter, and his leisure was spent in building a small boat, which was finished, ready for launching, which he proposed to do with considerable ceremony. The older boys came in from the College earlier than John one day, and when he arrived he beheld them to his great indignation in his boat out in the middle of the river. John was known as a very amiable boy, but on this occasion, standing on the wharf and stuttering with rage, he shrieked: "I hope—I hope—I hope you may set up!" which exclamation became ever after a household word.

My father's employees were always very much interested in his little daughter. During my whole life I have never forgotten their kind attentions. Every New Year's morning the dining room in the basement was overflowing with toys, mostly made with their own hands, ranged ready to greet my first appearance. I might here remark that Christmas was not at that time kept universally as it is now, perhaps because the English-speaking world had not as yet entirely recovered from the paralyzing effect of the abolition of the Feast, with its customs, by the Puritan Parliament.

Captain Easby performed several feats of engineering which sixty years ago were considered marvelous.

Mr. James Croggon, in his admirable letters on old Washington, has described the removal of Greenough's statue of Washington from the Navy Yard wharf to the rotunda of the Capitol, and afterwards the taking of it down again. He referred to the unpleasant feelings toward Captain Easby of the official engineers, who would not even undertake the

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job. This was so, for Captain Easby had many experiences of what Tennyson calls "The jealousies of little men." The elevation of a huge lantern over the dome of the Capitol was also engineered by Captain Easby. At the Arsenal he underpinned and raised a brick or stone building a story higher.

While he was Commissioner of Public Buildings during a heavy storm the elm tree at the northeast corner of La Fayette Square, was so injured that its three huge limbs were prone upon the ground. Jemmy Maher, the Public Gardener, coming in with his report, asked leave to clear away what he considered useless debris. Captain Easby, who could not brook the idea of losing a full-grown tree, sent to the ship yard for riggers and to the blacksmith shop for iron workers. He superintended the work himself, had the limbs lifted into position, and secured with a heavy iron band riveted through the trunk of the tree. The "Easby Elm," as some old inhabitants call it, is standing yet and a little search will disclose the scar of the band which it has been wearing for more than sixty years.

When the statue of Jackson was being raised upon its pedestal for its unveiling on the 8th of January, 1852, Captain Easby drove up in his buggy to find the riggers almost in despair at their inability to raise it one or two inches higher. Giving a glance at the rigging he ordered a few 25 buckets of water to be thrown on the ropes causing them to shrink sufficiently to bring the statue in a few moments to its place.

Captain Easby was one of the original members of the Washington Monument Association, and took a lively interest in its erection. He incurred the displeasure of its President by protesting against the stone that was to be used. He insisted that the iron pyrites in this stone, oxidizing, would cause fissures which would eventually endanger the whole structure. I fear that the present condition of the Monument verifies his prediction.

The displeasure of the officer named led him to refuse to accept a beautiful corner-stone for the Monument prepared at my father's quarries. This stone was afterwards used as the corner-stone of the extension of the Capitol in 1851.

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Captain Easby was an incessant reader and a lifelong student. He collected a most valuable library, which became so noted that many strangers visited and consulted it. He and Colonel Peter Force often exchanged their discovered treasures, as one or the other suited better the trend of thought of either.

He was always prominent in politics. His name may be found on all the committees appointed for special arrangements in connection with the incoming of a Whig President-elect.

He was a delegate to the Baltimore Convention that nominated Henry Clay, who was his personal friend.

General Harrison held a reception in February, 1841, in the Court House. The occasion was specially for ladies. He stood inside a booth decorated with flags. I, with my mother, was presented by my father. I was very small for my age, being not yet six, and had to be lifted to speak to him. He took me in his arms and, resting my feet on the railing, he held me by his left arm while greeting many of the visitors passing by. I was very happy to be thus noticed by the Hero, for I had been singing for months "Tippecanoe 26 and Tyler, too," and deemed myself a great political partisan, and my grief when he died was sincere.

I was my father's companion whenever it was practicable for me to be with him, as he drove around from point to point in the city and out into the country whenever his interests called him. To be with him was my greatest happiness. In these drives he taught me more of botany, of geology, of animal and vegetable life, than I learned in my school studies. Besides, I met in his company many of the prominent men of the day, Webster, Clay, Benton, Dr. Blake, Professor Henry, Messrs. Dickens and Noland, Charles F. Stansbury, M. F. Maury, Peter Force, J. G. C. Kennedy, the sculptors Greenough and Crawford, and others, many of whom to have seen and heard was in itself a branch of a liberal education.

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“There were giants in those days,” and the eyes once uplifted to behold them have perhaps found it difficult to adjust their vision since to mediocrity.

Very enjoyable were the visits to old Georgetown College that we made. The old tower building is the one I remember, with its library in which a door was concealed by its being painted in imitation of shelves of books. While my father was conversing with Father Ryder one of the other Jesuit fathers would entertain me in the museum and the physics room. I thus learned enough about electricity to give me some slight comprehension of the working of the telegraph, when I was taken to the Capitol, where Prof. Morse was making his demonstration in one of the committee rooms. As I remember the location it was a room facing east on the south of the crypt. Referring to the crypt, it was when my father was Commissioner of Public Buildings that he had the sub-crypt, which had been closed up for years, opened, and I was the first female to stand upon the spot, once intended for the sepulchre of Washington.

It is likely that in the visits to Georgetown College the 27 first impressions were made upon my mind which, after a score of years and long research, brought me into the Catholic Church.

My recollection of the famous Mrs. Ann Royal is quite vivid. She was a much talked of individual and suffered the penalty of living ahead of her time. While her enmities were strong her friendships were true. I had heard so much about her that the idea of meeting her rather filled me with uneasiness, but I found her very pleasant; and evidently, as I judge from this excerpt from the “Huntress,” her celebrated paper, my father was decidedly *persona grata* with her:

“ Captain Easby. —The benevolent, the lively and good natured Captain Easby it was likewise our good fortune to meet in the street. He is one of our earliest friends in this city, and one of those few Christians who ‘does good by stealth.’

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"Alas! He reminded us of the many dear friends of which death has deprived us in the past few years, viz: Generals Ripley and McComb, Colonel James Reeside, Captain Haman of Georgetown, and others."—The Huntress, October 29, 1842.

Captain Easby was a member of the Common Council from the First Ward almost continuously from 1836 until he went back to the east end of the city in 1848. Frequently associated with him in the Common Council was Edmond Hanley, his partner in the lime kilns. My brother Horatio also represented in 1853 and in 1860 this ward in the Common Council.

In 1841 Captain Easby was elected a Member of the National Institute for the Promotion of Science. He was also elected its Treasurer and was appointed its delegate to the World's Fair. The National Institute was the offspring of the Metropolitan Society, established in 1816, succeeded by the Columbian Society, chartered by Congress in 1818, which, falling into decrepitude, was revived as the National Institute, and after many years was absorbed by the Smithsonian. A monograph on these societies, their members and their work would be a valuable document to the "Oldest Inhabitants."

The last position of importance that Captain Easby filled was that of Commissioner of Public Buildings. I believe that the duties which devolved upon him are now distributed among three officers. He was appointed by President Taylor in 1849 and held the office until the year after Pierce's inauguration. When President Pierce came into office he had just lost, under most distressing circumstances, his only child, a son. Mrs. Pierce's grief-stricken condition aroused all my father's sympathy, and when she expressed a wish for a conservatory, he had a beautiful greenhouse built on the southeast of the White House in front of the stables. There was some fund of which the Commissioner had absolute control, which enabled him, independently of Congress, to gratify Mrs. Pierce's desire. This was the first conservatory at the White House. Pierce did not desire his resignation, but he gave it in favor of Colonel B. B. French. July 29th, 1854, he died from a severe attack of

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bilious fever. One of his obituaries, written by Colonel French, I wished to incorporate in this paper, but failed to lay hand upon it.

An obituary notice of the death of Captain Easby in the National Intelligencer, August 1, 1854, ends:

“The poor will need him, his friends will miss him, the energetic and active will enquire for him, and the answer to all will be in the ancient phrase of the Preacher: (Ecclesiastes) ‘Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.’”

At my father's obsequies the concourse was so great that the first carriage arrived at the Congressional Cemetery before the last left the house.

I hope, gentlemen, I have not wearied you with my reminiscences. The theme has been a pleasant one for me, and they say that old ladies are apt to be garrulous. I thank you for your kind attention.

APPENDIX.

I have been asked by one of the Oldest Inhabitants who is also a member of the Columbia Historical Society for information regarding the old house at Ninth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, east, which was my father's home for many years. This house was situated upon the tract known as Cern Abbey Manor, originally belonging to the Notley family.

William Easby bought lots 10 and 11 in square 925, upon which the house is located, at a mortgage sale held March 29th, 1821, for \$1,500. His deed was dated March 27th, 1822.

The property had been bought fourteen years before by Josiah Fox for \$1,800. The house was standing in 1795, but so far I have been unable to trace it beyond that date. The foundation and basement of the house are three feet thick. It was thirty-six feet broad and the same depth, massively built, it might stand a siege. In 1795, in a sale made by a party

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in Philadelphia, one William Turnicliff was appointed attorney. I suppose he it was who established a hotel there. It is supposed to be the oldest house now standing in the city.

I have been told that there was so much water in the neighborhood that it was necessary to keep a deep ditch on the Pennsylvania Avenue front, so the place, for that and other reasons, was dubbed "Warwick," by which name it was known in the family until 1857.

Here my father lived before moving to Easby's Point for more than seven years, beautifying the lot with flowers and fruit trees. He was specially fond of the crabapple blossoms and of hyacinths. I have learned that these blossoms abound in the Cleveland vales of Yorkshire, where he spent his early childhood.

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For some years, during the residence in the First Ward, the house was rented to William Doughty, the Naval Constructor at the Navy Yard. After Mr. Doughty left it became, for reasons which will be seen, not easy to rent.

Being the first real estate my father owned in Washington, he was very much attracted to the place, and when he turned over the ship yard business to his sons, in 1848, he returned to the old place, remodeled it inside, redeemed the old garden that had become a wilderness, and made it a comfortable and handsome residence and a beautiful spot. From around the chimneys on the first floor he had tons of brick removed. It may be that an immense brick oven was demolished.

During these intervening years the house had acquired the reputation of being haunted. The most unaccountable sounds were heard at intervals both day and night. Neither my father nor my mother was liable to fright, and it was only after long investigation that the source of the sounds was discovered.

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The house was isolated for quite a distance around, giving back echoes from several directions. As vehicles came down the Avenue the sounds began, increasing as they came nearer, decreasing and dying away as Tenth or Eleventh Street was reached.

It sounded as if someone, entering the side door, tramped slowly up the stairs, across the second hall and up the stairs again to one of the half story rooms, and was lost in one of the "cubbyholes" under the eaves. In this room was a deep spot on the floor which could not be removed, where they said a man wounded by the British in 1814 had bled to death. There is no doubt that the noises were but the echoes of passing vehicles. With the cause of the sounds established imagination no longer ran riot, and the "haunts" were forgotten.

The house, built long before the laying out of the squares, found itself fronting on an alley between the northern and 31 southern lots of the square, so the entrance was made on Ninth Street. Subsequently, my father became the owner of the whole square (925); the lot upon which he erected his new stables and carriage house being that at the northwest corner where the store of Ney & Co. is now situated, he bought in 1848 from Mike Shiner, a free negro celebrated as a wag, and for being possessed of a remarkable memory.

There were three cherry trees in front of the house, from two of which whoever wished might pick the fruit, but the one in front of the library window must be left untouched, solely for the birds, of whom there were myriads.

In this house, six weeks before my father's death, I was married to the Hon. William R. Smith of Alabama, and we lived there with my mother, until, upon his retirement from Congress in 1857, we returned to Alabama. My two older children were born in the old house. After that my brother Horatio, to whom it was bequeathed, came into possession, but not caring to live in that part of the city, he eventually sold it. It is in rather a dismal condition now, and makes one's heart ache to see it.

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At the conclusion of the address, which was highly appreciated, Mrs. Easby-Smith was elected an Honorary Member of the Association.

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